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Nesting Social-Analytical Perspectives: An Approach to Macro-Social Analysis

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Abstract

This paper introduces an approach to macro-social analysis based on the concept of "nesting" social-analytical perspectives. This approach provides a way to use multiple viewpoints or perspectives together in order to gain deeper systemic insights into whatever social situation is being analysed, whether it be for the pure study of social systems, the development of organisational strategy, or the formulation of policy options. The approach is demonstrated using a set of perspectives to examine aspects of international relations and the history of the world system.

Keywords: social systems, macrohistory, international relations, world system history

Part I – Theoretical foundation

1. Introduction

This article suggests advanced ways of using social-analytical and macro-historical models and perspectives as a powerful means to undertake macro-social analyses and long-range futures thinking based upon them.

According to Johan Galtung (1997d), macrohistory is "the study of the histories of social systems, along separate trajectories, in search of patterns", and deals with "vast space, vast time, vast themes" (Galtung 1997d: 1). It "should be mined for insight [and] should not be seen in strictly empirical terms, that is, abused by being believed as the total view" (Galtung 1997d: 3). Rather, "A more healthy attitude would be to see a perspective as only that – one in an unbounded set of perspectives" (Galtung 1997d: 5). This last idea will be taken up here and explored in more

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detail–namely, how different social, historical and macrohistorical models, theories and perspectives can mutually enrich each other and provide increased analytical and interpretive power to any social analysis, including those intended for use in strategy or policy development.

The basic proposition being suggested here is that there is much insight to be gained – for both theoretical exploration as well as practical application – from "nesting" social-analytical perspectives.

The reason is two-fold. First, in order to undertake any analysis of social structures or processes – whether it be for the pure study of social systems, for the development of organisational strategy, or for the formulation of policy options – it is necessary to make use of some sort of analytical or interpretive framework. With the use of any interpretive framework comes the attendant risk of missing potentially important insights due to the inevitable limitations and blind spots which are inherent in any single interpretive system. This can and has led many times to failures of strategy and policy analysis, for the simple reason that one's view is inherently partial and blinkered if one is "locked into" a particular perspective. Therefore, one way to mitigate this risk is to not rely on only a single interpretive framework; but, rather, to use several different frameworks either separately or in concert with each other to gain a broader and deeper view of the situation being analysed.

Second, no level of social organisation – personal, social, global – remains completely uninfluenced by effects or factors in other levels. Therefore any analysis which aims for deep insight at these levels of analysis needs to take explicitly into consideration what influences or constraining factors may exist at other levels. Thus, by also considering analyses or perspectives which, in a sense, are both implicitly "contained within" a particular perspective – to provide finer structural detail – and others which are "more general" than that particular perspective – to provide contextualisation – we can both mitigate against possible blind spots as well as potentially generate broader systemic insights. This can greatly help our interpretive understanding of the situation being analysed and any futures work we may conduct from that basis.

This article specifically considers a generic framework for how different perspectives may be conceptually "nested" within others, which latter are themselves nested within still others, and so on, in a sequence of ever-widening contexts and ever-broadening generalisation. This approach provides a useful way to gain conceptual "distance" from particular perspectives by reminding us to regard them as simply examples of a certain type of perspective at a particular level of analysis, rather than as the definitive perspective. In this way, we may insert, remove, compare and contrast different models and perspectives in any analysis, in order to look for more generalised and contextualised insights. The two central metaphors in this approach, then, are the "onion" which has many nested layers, and the "zoom lens" which allows us to consciously alter the analytical focus

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at will.

In the next section, the use of social, historical and macrohistorical models as part of an overall foresight process will be discussed, showing where and how they can be utilised as a basis for futures thinking. Then, the theoretical framework of Galtung (1997d) is described as a basis for classifying different types of social analysis. Following this, some observations are made about how the different types of analysis can be used together to create insights through continually re-adjusting the focus of an analysis to be "more specific" or "more general" as required. And, finally, in order to illustrate the use of this approach, an example "thumbnail sketch" meta-analysis is conducted using perspectives at the level of international relations and the history of the world system.

2. Using social and historical perspectives in foresight work

Recent work in futures studies has increasingly taken the view that reality is "layered", and that, therefore, "layered methodologies" need to be employed to better understand and interpret this complex reality (e.g. Inayatullah 2002). To this end, a generalised framework for "layered methodology" has been developed elsewhere (Voros 2005), based on a number of sources.[1] The levels of depth range from events, through trends, systemic drivers, and worldviews, to the deep underlying social-historical dynamics. An adapted version of this framework is shown in Table 1.

event	discrete events and occurrences
trend	patterns, trends, pop/litany
system	system drivers, social causes, policy analysis
worldview	mental models, discourses, perspectives
	myths, metaphors, symbols, images
	intelligences, types, structures, modes
historical	social change and related forces and factors
	historical factors and forces
	macro-historical factors and forces

Table 1: A schema for "layering". Adapted from Voros (2005; 2006)

This layering framework is one part of a "generic foresight process" framework which conceptualises foresight as a broad sequence of methodological interventions or knowledge-creating activities moving through five main "phases", which are best considered as broadly over-lapping foci of activity rather than rigidly separated "steps" (Voros 2001; 2003; 2005; 2006). These phases range from the gathering of *Inputs*, initial *Analysis* and then deeper *Interpretation* of these inputs, to

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the actual generation of forward views or images of the future – what is there called *"Prospection"* (Voros 2003) – and thence to the generation of specific *Outputs* which themselves become inputs into further strategy-creation or policy-formation processes.

These layers are not, in themselves, concerned with the future *per se*. Rather, they are concerned with analysing and understanding, to progressively greater degrees of "depth", how the past was laid down and how the present has come to be. How this layered view becomes relevant to *futures* is when the layers are used as the basis for explicitly *prospective* modes of thinking during Prospection (Voros 2006). In this layering framework, social, historical and macrohistorical forces and factors are considered to inhabit the "deepest" level of interpretive inquiry. Thus, by using social, historical and macrohistorical models, theories and perspectives – of increasing scope and time-frame – we may look for insights at a very deep level and thereby undertake profoundly "deep" futures thinking.

3 The framework

According to Galtung (1997d), we can study or view human systems at three main levels of analysis: the level of the *individual person*; the level of *social systems*; and the level of *world systems*. Distinctions can be made between different foci of study. The focus may be on the stages and causes of change *through time* (termed *diachronic*), or it could be *at some specific point in time* (termed *synchronic*). As well, distinctions may be made between focussing on a *specific single case* (termed *idiographic*), in contrast to seeking regularities, *patterns*, *or generalised "laws"* (termed *nomothetic*). This conception is shown in adapted form in Table 2.[2]

		Synchronic	Diachronic
Level 1. Person systems	**Idiographic**	Interviews	Biography
	Nomothetic	Psychology	Microhistory, genetic psychology
Level 2. Social systems	**Idiographic**	Anthropology	History
	Nomothetic	Sociology, economics, political science	Social macrohistory
Level 3. World systems	**Idiographic**	Yearbooks	World system history
	Nomothetic	International relations	World macrohistory

Table 2: Three levels of social analysis. Adapted from Galtung (1997d).

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To illustrate, we can see by looking at Table 2 that, at the level of person systems, the study of a particular person (i.e. idiographic) through time (i.e. diachronic) yields a "biography" of that person. The study of social systems at a particular time (synchronic) looking for regularities, patterns or "laws" (nomothetic) yields economics, sociology, and political science. The study of world systems at a particular time (synchronic) seeking regularities or patterns (nomothetic) is the field of "international relations" (at least, for the Earth–the only known example so far).

Table 2 distinguishes two main classes of macrohistory: for social systems and for world systems. Both forms are nomothetic-diachronic – i.e., they each seek after general patterns or "laws" of change through time within their respective levels of analysis. This is no simple or, indeed, modest enterprise: "The macrohistorian is to history what Einstein...is for the run-of-the-mill physicist" (Galtung 1997d: 8). In their book, Galtung and Inayatullah (1997) collect together twenty summaries of perspectives on macrohistory. Inayatullah (1997a) compares these various macrohistorical models as a step towards a possible general theory of macrohistory, and Galtung examines what insights can be gained from comparing macrohistorical perspectives with others (1997c), and by looking at personal microhistory, social macrohistory and world macrohistory as possible metaphors for each other (1997f; 1997g).

We will generally use the word type to refer to the idiographic, nomothetic, synchronic and diachronic characteristics of perspectives without reference to any level of analysis, and the word class when referring to both type and level. Thus, "nomothetic-diachronic" is a type of perspective, while personal microhistory, social macrohistory and world macrohistory are different classes of this same basic type, as can be seen in Table 2.

4 Modes of generalisation

As mentioned above, the basic proposition being suggested here is that there is potentially much insight to be gained from "nesting" social-analytical perspectives, including macrohistorical ones. But what does this mean in practice? It means that almost any model or perspective which can be located within one of the classes (or "cells") of Table 2 is both "more general" than some perspectives – and, as it were, may "encompass" them – and "more specific" than others – and may be encompassed by them. In other words, different models, theories or perspectives – and these words are treated as more-or-less interchangeable in this discussion – can (conceptually) be "nested" within others, which latter are themselves nested within still others, and so on, to increasing degrees of "nestedness" (and, indeed, higher levels of analysis). Thus, as mentioned earlier, the two central metaphors in this approach are the "onion" which has many nested layers, and the "zoom lens" which allows us to consciously alter our analytical focus as we proceed.

Every analytical process has a starting point. The perspective

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which forms the initial basis or starting point of the analysis is called the *base perspective*. The perspective which is our focus of analysis at any particular time is called the (current) *focal perspective*. Obviously, there is only ever a single base perspective, but there can and should be many different focal perspectives as the analysis proceeds and different perspectives are introduced and brought to bear; and, of course, the first focal perspective used in the analysis is the base perspective itself.

Given that we will be seeking to consciously change focal perspectives during any analytical process in order to generate new insights, it helps to understand what types or modes of generalisation are possible in the theoretical framework of Table 2. This will allow us to properly use other perspectives which may either be generalised by the current focal perspective or, conversely, which may generalise it.

A complete methodology delineating how many and what kinds of generalisations are possible in the Galtung framework is yet to be fully elaborated. The discussion given here is meant to be illustrative of – rather than exhaustive with respect to – the modes of generalisations which have so far been found to be useful in employing this approach. No doubt others will find newer and different ways to mine the richness of Galtung's typology.

It seems that there are two main types of generalisations possible: those within a level of analysis; and those across or between levels of analysis. While it is obvious that person systems (level 1) are subsumed and encompassed by social systems (level 2), and social systems by world systems (level 3), it is also the case that even within a given level of analysis there are some types of perspectives which are "broader" or more general than others. Let us examine these first.

4.1 Within a level

At any given level of analysis in Table 2, there are at least two main ways to move to increasing degrees of generalisation while still remaining within the level.

One way is to move from a specific individual case to a generalised pattern or "law". This mode of generalisation is thus **"idiographic-to-nomothetic"**. The nomothetic perspective may have been generalised from a comparison of many different examples, or may have come by way of generalising from a single example. Clearly, one would prefer any nomothetic perspective to have as broad a basis as possible.

The other way is to generalise by contextualising *in time*, and this can take two different forms.

First, a synchronic perspective may be generalised by a diachronic one – that is, by using a perspective which places an interval of time "around" the "snapshot" synchronic view. In this way, the "static" synchronic perspective may be "located" or "situated" within a more general "dynamic" diachronic perspective, and dynamics not visible from the synchronic perspective may become visible and be subject to analysis within the broader diachronic perspective. This mode of generalisation is thus **"synchronic-in-diachronic".**

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The "contextualising in time" form of generalisation can be applied not only to synchronic perspectives, but can be applied to diachronic perspectives as well. A particular characteristic of diachronic perspectives is the length of time which the perspective takes or over which the perspective is framed. Some perspectives take a "longer" view in time than others, so these, too, could generalise or encompass perspectives which use a shorter time-frame. Thus, the second way to generalise by contextualising in time is to encompass or embed a diachronic perspective which uses a certain time-scale inside another diachronic perspective which uses an even longer time-scale. For example, a diachronic perspective which uses a ten-year time-frame to contextualise a synchronic perspective may itself be contextualised and generalised by a diachronic perspective which uses a fifty-year time-frame, and so on. This mode of generalisation is thus **"diachronic-in-diachronic"**.

Now some examples to illustrate. For the sake of definiteness, we will use terminology from level 2 of Table 2. An anthropological (i.e. idiographic-synchronic) perspective may be encompassed by an (idiographic-diachronic) historical one, which is a synchronic-in-diachronic generalisation. A (nomothetic-synchronic) perspective on economics might also be encompassed by a perspective on history, which is also a synchronic-in-diachronic generalisation; however, this is also a *reversal* of the idiographic-to-nomothetic mode of generalisation (i.e. it instead goes from nomothetic generality to idiographic specificity), so would need to be evaluated on its merits for the specific analysis being undertaken. This perspective on history might use a time-span of, say, 500 years. It could be generalised by another perspective which took a longer view, say, 5000 years, a diachronic-in-diachronic generalisation. And a model of history may be encompassed by a (nomothetic-diachronic) model of social macro-history, which is an idiographic-to-nomothetic generalisation. Thus, the *most general* type of perspective within any given level of analysis would seem to be those which are nomothetic-diachronic.

Of course, other generalisations are also possible; the reader should hopefully have grasped the basic idea from these examples. In closing this section, we also note that we could equally well have used level 1 or level 3, and substituted terms from within those levels, into the preceding paragraph and the same principles of generalisation would still apply. The reader might wish to experiment with those levels using pencil and paper and terms specific to them.

4.2 Between levels

The second main type of generalisation – between levels of analysis – is not as straight-forward as those within a level, and more detailed work is required to produce a full and rigorous elaboration of the possibilities. For reasons of space, the discussion here will necessarily consider only what is needed later when this approach is applied to a "thumbnail sketch" meta-analysis at the world system level with a base perspective in international rela-

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tions. Other ways to combine perspectives across levels are clearly possible than will be shown here. It is hoped that this discussion is suggestive enough to lead other researchers to use the Galtung framework to find other ways to combine perspectives across levels in their own work.

As Galtung has observed (1997f; 1997g), there may be insights to be gained by comparisons between perspectives on personal microhistory (level 1), social macrohistory (level 2) and world macrohistory (level 3). These are all of the same basic type – nomothetic-diachronic – so Galtung's suggestion seems to be that perspectives of analogous type (or, at the very least, of this type) may have "resonances" across levels.

Extending this line of thought, it is also possible to look for insights across levels of analysis without the perspectives necessarily being of the same type. As has been noted earlier, person systems are subsumed by social systems, and social systems by world systems, so the idea of looking for insights across levels of analysis is not surprising. In this mode of generalisation, two perspectives in different levels may each offer insights to the other, whether by "zooming in" from the higher level to the lower to look for a finer degree of structural detail, or by "zooming out" from the lower level to the higher to look for possible constraining or contextualising factors in the wider system.

For example, the level of social systems (level 2) can be conceived as a collection of multiple units of analysis in level 1 (i.e. persons) viewed in aggregated or collective form (i.e. as multiple persons interacting to form the collective social system), and so perspectives at level 1 may be used to gain insights into how members of societies may behave or interact with each other. Similarly, we could also consider world systems (level 3), as a collection of social systems (i.e. units of analysis at level 2) mutually interacting in an aggregated or collective form (i.e. multiple societies interacting to form the world system), and thus perspectives at level 2 may be used to gain insights into how different societies may behave or interact with each other.

If the shift of analytical focus is to a lower level in order to gain insights from perspectives on the lower-level's unit of analysis, then one would probably prefer to use the most general perspectives from the lower level to inform the analytical work at the upper. From our earlier observations about generalisations within a level, perspectives at the lower level which are both nomothetic and diachronic would seem to be the most preferred class of perspectives to use. In particular, therefore – and anticipating the discussion later – a (nomothetic-diachronic) perspective on social macrohistory could be used to shed light on the inner workings of the different societies which collectively make up the world system in analyses of, for example: international relations (nomothetic-synchronic); the configuration of the world system at a particular time (idiographic-synchronic); or, indeed, the overall historical development of the world system itself (idiographic-diachronic). The case of perspectives on social

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macrohistory informing perspectives on world macrohistory has already been discussed by Galtung (1997g).

The analogous case is true, as well, for whole-of-lifespan perspectives on human psychology (which are nomothetic-diachronic perspectives at level 1) when taken to the level of social systems, and may inform the four types of perspective at level 2. While other ways of generalising across levels are also possible, of course, further elaboration of these will be left for another time and place.

The brief exposition here of this generalised approach to macrosocial analysis has hopefully given readers enough background to pique their interest in using Galtung's framework as a way to generate insights in such analyses. Let us now turn to examining how the theory as expounded above may be used in practice.

Part II – Application

5. Nesting perspectives as method

The basic method for the practical use of this idea of "nesting" perspectives is simply this: we choose a level (1-, 2- or 3-) and type (idiographic or nomothetic, synchronic or diachronic) of analysis in the Galtung framework, which is congruent with the real-world social situation to be analysed. This choice thereby selects a class of models, theories or perspectives to consider as a possible "base" perspective. From among the members of this class of possibilities, we then choose the actual base perspective, recognising that it is merely one possible choice. This particular choice will depend on a variety of factors, including: relevance, utility, suitability, familiarity, generality, and so on. Having chosen a base perspective, we then look to other classes of perspective which the base perspective both encompasses and extends (i.e. we "zoom in"), and also to more general perspectives which encompass and extend the base perspective (i.e. we "zoom out"). The other perspectives might be on the same level or on other levels of analysis. We zoom in to reveal finer detail and sub-structure, and zoom out to look at context and possible super-ordinate constraining factors.

This process of "zooming" in and out may be repeated recursively with any or all of the other perspectives now acting as the new focal perspective. This procedure helps to contextualise the overall analysis and may reveal insights about finer detail or wider context which were not visible from the initial base perspective itself. The real point of this approach is to ensure that we can *consciously* alter the analytical focus at any time to be broader or sharper, as required; and, most importantly, that we do not fall into the all-too-common trap of relying on only a single perspective as the foundation of our analytical or interpretive system.

Now to an example of the use of this approach.

For the rest of this paper, we shall undertake a "whistle-stop tour" of selected perspectives to both illustrate this technique, and to highlight how greater contextualisation and increasing scope can alter our

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initial perceptions of what is actually important in the situation being analysed. This tour of perspectives will take the form of a "thumbnail sketch", as it were, rather than a detailed critical examination of the contents or thesis of each of the different perspectives. This is because we are less interested in the perspectives themselves than in demonstrating the ways in which they may be combined together to generate insights. In other words, this illustration is primarily a demonstration of process rather than an examination of content. We will, however, be highlighting, at various points, some of the insights which the different focal perspectives offer to the overall flow of the extended analysis.

The choice of perspectives presented below is clearly only one possible set out of a wide range of possibilities, of course, and should be considered illustrative rather than exhaustive; readers are able to substitute into the "cells" of Galtung's framework any model or perspective of their own choosing. Indeed, this very freedom to choose suitably appropriate perspectives is precisely the point of using this generalised approach. It would be most interesting and illuminating to add other ideas and perspectives from different cultural backgrounds to the mix and see what insights would be so generated by this ideational "cross-pollination".

In what follows, recalling the earlier advice of Galtung, we look to see what insights these perspectives bring us, and attempt to avoid the trap of "believe it/don't believe it" games.

6. World system macro-perspectives

For many people in the "post-September 11" world, the largest-scale "big-picture" issues they encounter each day, on the daily news or in current affairs programs, are the closely-related areas of global geopolitics and national security. Many people are fearful of the global future, and would like to develop some understanding of what may lie ahead on the global scale. The appropriate level of analysis for this domain in the Galtung framework is level 3, world systems, and the specific areas of global geopolitics and national security are aspects of the general area of "international relations",[3] which is of nomothetic-synchronic type.

Thus, to begin our analysis we need to choose a base perspective on international relations from among the many possibilities which exist. One relevant and very influential perspective on international relations in recent years has been the "clash of civilisations" thesis of Samuel Huntington (1993), and some futurists have already used this perspective as part of their futures work (e.g. Bell 2002; Bilgin 2006). Let us, then, use this particular perspective as our base perspective.

6.1 The "clash of civilisations"

Huntington (1993) takes the view that it will be the "clash of civilisations" along "fault lines" between civilisations which will dominate global politics in the coming years. A civilisation is defined rather loosely,

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but essentially it represents a broadly common sociocultural pattern, or culture, often but not always related to religion. Huntington's thesis is that there are nine major "civilisational blocks" in the current world system – Western, Latin American, African, Japanese, Chinese, Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic and Orthodox (Eastern Christianity) – many of which have major sub-divisions or variants (e.g. the distinct North American and European variants of Western civilisation, or the Arab, Turkic and Malay variants of Islam). He suggests that the major flash points of potential conflict will be where these various "civilisational blocks" come together and interact (e.g. the Balkans, parts of the Middle East, and so on).

Several factors are thought to be driving this process of clashing, including the basic "identity" or worldview which being a member of a civilisation confers on a group of people, the increasing foreshortening of distance in the world, economic factors, the relative immutability of cultural differences in comparison to economic or political ones, and the role of the West in polarising civilisation-consciousness in non-Western civilisations (as a response to its present economic and military power). Huntington initially advanced this "clash" hypothesis in an article (1993) and framed it as a question; he subsequently expanded this notion in book form into a broader thesis in which this clash of civilisations leads to the remaking of world order (1996).

We now seek to gain further insight into international relations as portrayed by Huntington's perspective by also considering the dynamics *within* Huntington's unit of analysis – a "civilisation" – which latter confers a social or cultural identity on individuals living within the civilisation. That is, we now move the analytical focus from Huntington's (level 3, nomothetic-synchronic) perspective to a (level 2, nomothetic-diachronic) social macrohistorical one, in order to "zoom in" to consider "finer-grain" perspectives on social dynamics while also looking for models which consider civilisational or social "identity".

6.2 Intra-civilisational social dynamics

Among the more interesting commentaries on Huntington and, from our point of view, relevant to our purposes here, is the one by Ken Wilber (2000b: chap. 6). Wilber suggests that, while Huntington unquestionably presents some valuable insights, the analysis is rather static in its conception of what constitutes a civilisation – and could be enhanced by an understanding of the evolutionary development of the worldviews which are at the heart of culture, which latter essentially defines a civilisation for Huntington. In Wilber's view, the horizontal "tectonic plates" which form the basis of Huntington's analysis need to be viewed as also possessing, as it were, deeper "archeological strata" (Wilber 2000b: 119) made up of the vertical profiles of the historical development of consciousness and worldviews within each civilisational block.

In order to take this "depth view", Wilber makes use of a variant of Spiral Dynamics (Beck & Cowan

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1996) – a biopsychosocial model of human development based on the work of psychologist Clare Graves (1970; 1974) who investigated human value systems. One of the authors of Spiral Dynamics, Don Beck (2000), has explicitly used the (level 1, nomothetic-diachronic) model of Graves to create a (level 2) macrohistorical view of social development. (This, incidentally, illustrates Galtung's observation that models which are nomothetic-diachronic can generate insights across levels). In Wilber's view, therefore, there are both horizontal effects (e.g. geographical boundaries) as well as vertical effects (e.g. different stages of overall sociocultural and technological development within different blocks) which need to be taken into account in any macro-analysis of international relations. Thus, Wilber's analysis uses a particular (level 2, nomothetic-diachronic) macrohistorical sociocultural developmental model – in this case, Beck's variant of Spiral Dynamics – nested within a broader pan-global (level 3, nomothetic-synchronic) model of international relations – in this case, Huntington's – and is an excellent example of the nesting of perspectives to generate deeper insight.

Beck's perspective (2000) analyses the developmental profile of societies according to a set of eight major "bands" of biopsychosocial structures based on value systems (which are given mnemonic colour names, e.g., blue, orange, green, etc). These developmental profiles can be surveyed and mapped. All societies exhibit distinctive developmental profiles (see, e.g. Wilber 2000b: 119) which represent the distribution of individuals' value system profiles aggregated over the whole society. (One sees here how level 1 factors can make themselves felt at level 2.) The relative proportions and distribution of different value systems have important implications for the development of social policy, national planning and the structure of governance. Beck most famously used this model as part of his work with the major political figures in South Africa, which helped pave the way for the transition out of apartheid (Beck & Linscott 1991).

Of course, other models of social macrohistory could equally well have been used to examine intra-civilisational dynamics. For example, the theory of social change of P.R. Sarkar (Inayatullah 1997b).[4] In this perspective there is a cycle of struggle between the different mindsets/mentalities/identities of workers, military, intellectuals and merchants, with dominance held by one or other group/mindset at different points in the cycle. Another relevant perspective is that of Pitirim Sorokin (Galtung 1997e) whose three main types of cultural mentality – ideational, sensate, and idealistic – each have quite different outlooks on the world and how to interact with it. The intra-civilisational dynamics in both of these perspectives would also have effects beyond the edges of the civilisation when interacting with others. And we could even make use of Toynbee's noted "challenge and response" perspective on the rise and fall of civilisations (Galtung 1997a) as a way of examining the possible future dynamics of the different "clashing" Huntingtonian

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civilisations. And so on. One quickly sees how (level 2) social perspectives could enrich the (level 3) global one.

One of the things we learn from examining social macrohistorical models in general is that the *intra*-civilisational dynamics of societies can have profound effects on and implications for the *inter*-civilisational dynamics of international relations. And, furthermore, the overall shape, extent and character of these implications may be understood and properly taken into account in geopolitical analyses.

Having examined intra-social dynamics and how they might affect inter-civilisational dynamics, we now return to the level of world systems and look to see what other insights may have been generated by the social macrohistorical models we have examined.

6.3 Global dynamics

We can immediately see, for example, that the perspective taken by Willis Harman (1998) – that a "global mind change" is coming – actually represents, in the Beck model of social development, a transition of OECD/First-World nations out of a profile peak centred in one value system structure ("orange") to a peak centred on the next band in the sequence ("green"). There are several implications for our understanding of global dynamics which flow from this insight, although we will not dwell on them here as both Beck's model and Spiral Dynamics have much to say on this topic. Instead, we note that while Harman's perspective examines, in part, aspects of the configuration of the world system at a particular time – so that this aspect of his view is synchronic in character – it also discusses the possible dynamics of an historical transition of some of the societies making up the world system (which we can now view through a variety of social macrohistorical models, including Beck's and Spiral Dynamics) – and this dynamical element adds a diachronic aspect to his perspective. Thus, Harman's view is a kind of "straddling" perspective, which leads the focus of our attention away from synchronic perspectives at the world system level toward diachronic ones, by way of the synchronic-in-diachronic mode of generalisation discussed in Section 4.1. And in so doing, it takes us into the realm of world system level idiographic-diachronic perspectives; that is, into "world system history" (Denemark et al. 2000).

As a field of study, the broad arena of world system history attempts to understand how (in our case) the planet Earth has, over historical time, come to have the configuration it currently has.

One of the early very influential perspectives in world system history is the world-systems approach of Immanuel Wallerstein which examines the historical development of the modern capitalist world-system (Goldfrank 2000; Wallerstein 2004). It takes a strongly but not exclusively economic perspective, and considers relational exchanges between a capital-intensive "core", a labour-intensive "periphery", and an intermediary "semi-periphery". These are geographically and culturally distinct

regions undertaking the indicated forms of production. One recognises a resonance with and a basis in Marxist theory (Galtung 1997b), and this perspective suggests a mechanism for how the parts of the contemporary world system designated First, Second, and Third World arose as they did. Wallerstein's perspective considers the last few centuries of history. Later workers sought to extend the analyses both by looking beyond a primary focus on economics, and by looking further into the past, the latter being an example of what we have called the diachronic-in-diachronic mode of generalisation – contextualising one diachronic perspective within another having a longer time-frame (Section 4.1). A review of several other perspectives on world system history is given by Thompson (2000).

The area of "world system history" tends to be concerned with *human* history, so these analyses generally focus on the last 500 to 5000 years or so of the Earth's history (so all of these longer perspectives generalise Wallerstein's through the diachronic-in-diachronic mode of contextualising in time). However, some perspectives exist which attempt to take an even longer view in time, such as that of Jared Diamond (1997), which looks back 13,000 years and examines the role that geographical circumstances played in shaping human history and civilisation. There are, of course, also perspectives which consider human evolution itself over the last few million years, or natural history over the last few hundred million years, but perhaps one of the most ambitious and long-term contextualising perspectives of all is that of James Lovelock (Jones 1997). It is a diachronic contextualisation *par excellence* of idiographic-diachronic perspectives at the world system level.

6.4 "Gaia"

Lovelock conceives of the entire planet Earth as a single living organism, which he calls "Gaia", after the Earth Mother of Greek mythology. Lovelock's hypothesis is that the emergence of life on Earth thousands of millions of years ago altered the nature of the Earth's physical and atmospheric processes in such a way as to regulate these processes to ensure the further continuation of conditions conducive to life. In other words, much as our own bodies regulate themselves to ensure our continued survival ("homeostasis"), so too, suggests Lovelock, does the very existence of life on Earth regulate the Earth's many life-supporting processes. We learn from this perspective, then, that we tamper with the Earth's processes – physical, climatological, biological, and others – to our collective peril.

The history of Gaia subsumes and encompasses human history and evolution, by situating and contextualising the few brief moments of the latter within the vast expanses of time which have elapsed since the beginning of the former. By asking us to take such a very long view, we are almost forced to consider the debt we owe to the planet which gave birth to us as a species, and the responsibility we have to stew-

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ard this world with as much wisdom as we can possibly muster. We are also forced, by extension, to consider vast tracts of time extending away into the future. And, since Earth/Gaia got along very nicely without us to begin with, and has done so for most of its/her "lifetime" (despite many instances of mass species extinction), we are also forced to consider our own extinction as a species, whether imposed from without or through our own stupidity (e.g. Bostrom 2002; Clarke 1999; Diamond 2005).

6.5 The challenge of planetary civilisation

Assuming that we successfully navigate this period of danger in our species' history, the perspective of Duane Elgin (1994; 2000) turns from the historical long view backwards to the developmental long view forwards. This perspective therefore contextualises all of the world system level idiographic-diachronic *historical* perspectives considered so far by adding a *future* dimension to those perspectives.

Elgin sees humanity as being pivotally challenged by the damage which is being done to the biosphere through our current activities – a planetary-level echo of Toynbee's "challenge and response" perspective on social macrohistory – and suggests ways that we will need to respond. He extends the familiar pattern of human techno-economic development – hunter-gathering, agriculture, industrialisation – to newer stages of development, and maintains the central importance of human consciousness – a planetary-level echo of the ideas of Wilber (2000b) and Beck (2000), and a direct extension into the future of the perspective of Harman (1998). Sustainability, seen by many today as an end in itself, is viewed by Elgin as simply the *first* necessary step which our species needs to take if it is to survive and mature. He lays out the overall shape of the stages of an evolutionary process leading to initial maturity as a planetary civilisation, the details of which are less important than the very idea of such a development. They involve not merely an "outer" development of techno-economic modes of production, but "inner" modes of development – of new values, purposes and ideals to provide a compelling vision of a united human family and extended community, which is ever "surpassing itself". And, from that vantage point of maturity, should we attain it, our civilisation should thereby have the appropriate degrees of "perspective, wisdom, creativity and compassion necessary to sustain itself into the distant future" (Elgin 1994: 239).

What we learn from Elgin's perspective is that despite the existential risks and dangers we currently face – many of which are of our own doing – there is nevertheless the potential and the possibility of humankind rising to meet the challenge. His message, while one of warning, is also one of hope, and points towards a human destiny as a mature planetary civilisation which "represents both the completion of a long process of development and the foundation for a new beginning, perhaps to participate in a community of life of galactic scale" (Elgin 1994: 239).

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7. Beyond the world system

At this point we reach the limit of the framework that Galtung laid out: the level of world systems.[5] Nevertheless, Galtung has also noted that

> *The macrohistorical approach also makes sense beyond this. Imagine if we discovered other worlds with historical processes. We could then move up one level and write an interworld history as raw material for a macrohistory of interplanetary or even intergalactic systems, incorporating biological and physical systems, and their rhythms (1997d: 3).*

If we were to extend the framework of Galtung to higher levels of analysis than world systems, we would need to use some sort of organising principle to do so. The astrophysicist Nikolai Kardashev (1964) suggested a classification of technological civilisations which recognises three main levels: planetary; stellar; and galactic. One can immediately see how this typology would both extend the framework of Galtung and suggest new levels of analysis.

One possibility could be to repeat the basic pattern of increasing spatial scope begun in Table 2. Level 1 is the level of individual persons. Level 2 is the level of multiple persons interacting as social systems (on a single world, which is the next level up). Level 3 is the level of multiple social-systems interacting as a (single) world system. Thus, Level 4 might be the level of multiple world systems (within a single stellar system, which is the next level up); Level 5 is then the level of (single) stellar systems; so, Level 6 is thus the level of multiple stellar systems (in a single galaxy, which is the next level up); and Level 7 the level of (single) galactic systems. This could of course be extended even further by using extensions to Kardashev's original three-level typology which have since been proposed.

The Kardashev classification implicitly lays out a possible trajectory for our collective future evolution and, like Elgin, invites our thinking to move beyond the planetary level to consider the human move into space. This brings us to the edge of an enormous new macro-social and macrohistorical vista, one which further invites us to consider whether these levels of social organisation might have been attained elsewhere by other intelligent beings. And that means considering the somewhat controversial subject of extra-terrestrial intelligence (Morrison et al. 1979; Sagan & Shklovskii 1966).

Although we will not pursue this any further here – these ideas will be explored in another paper – the very idea of looking beyond our own current world system and considering the possible existence of extra-terrestrial intelligence brings up some huge questions and issues for humankind to consider, and acts as a mirror to our image of ourselves as an intelligent species. It forces us, for example, to rethink our current planet-altering activities and to consider how our own planetary history – past and present, including the current state of our world – may be interpreted by other intelligent beings (e.g. how would alien observers view our stewardship of Planet Earth?) And from this basic idea,

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some essential and quite profound questions emerge, such as: how do we go about estimating how many intelligent civilisations are out there? And, what can this process teach us about ourselves, our place in the universe, and our future as a species?

Concluding remarks

The central idea in this paper was that different models, theories, analyses or perspectives can (conceptually) be "nested" within others, which latter are themselves nested within still others, and so on, to higher degrees of nestedness in a sequence of ever-widening contexts and ever-broadening generalisation.

The utility of this approach is that it allows one to generate insight into, as well as to contextualise, macro-social analyses at various levels of analysis. Effects or factors visible at different levels of analysis may exert influence upward or downward, so the existence of such effects needs to be explicitly taken into account in the analytical procedure. The theoretical framework of Galtung can be conceptualised as a generalised "scaffold" structure that is given shape and power depending upon the particular models or perspectives chosen to inhabit the classes or "cells" of the framework in any specific analysis.

Let us at this point quickly recap just how far we have come, even on our very quick "whistle-stop tour" of "thumbnail sketches" of nested macro-social perspectives. We began with the already quite "macro" arena of contemporary international relations. We then examined how perspectives on social macrohistory could create insight into the dynamics within societies, as well as into the behaviour and mutual interactions of these societies in the wider world system. We saw how an understanding of individual human psychology could inform an understanding of collective social psychology, and the implications this has for understanding some of the "transitions" occurring in the world system. We saw how the current configuration of the world system could be understood as but a snapshot in time of the broader process of human history, and then saw how human history itself can be seen in the broader context of the evolution of life on Earth. We saw how the potential evolution of human consciousness itself lays out a pathway toward a sustainable planetary civilisation of a united human family. And we briefly touched upon the possible implications of perspectives which move beyond the world system – that is, which take an extra-terrestrial perspective – to contextualise human history; past, present and future.

It is doubtful that traditional forms of (social, strategic or policy) analysis could have examined such a wide range of different perspectives, whilst also drawing out key insights and the inter-relationships between them, as well as their wider contexts. Indeed, since traditional approaches to strategy or policy tend to use one or two frameworks of interpretive understanding, at best, it is difficult to see how traditional forms of analysis – and, indeed, futures analyses based upon them – could do anything other than fail to

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reveal precisely the complexities found at multiple levels of analysis which need to be considered and understood; and this leads inevitably to failures of strategy and policy. By using an approach such as the one described here, it is possible to consciously, deliberately and systematically explore the implications of multiple perspectives at multiple levels of social analysis to both draw out key insights and to see how each perspective adds to an overall understanding of the complex social situation being analysed.

The use of, for example, societal-level factors in world-level analyses – or, indeed, an extra-terrestrial perspective in global analyses – helps us develop the ability to move beyond parochial, shallow, narrow, limited, and short-term viewpoints – an ability which may very well be vital to our continued survival as a species. We have seen that the process of nesting progressively broader macro-perspectives has led us from merely analysing the ideological posturings of competing nation-states and clashing civilisations being run on a short-term political/economic agenda, to the consideration of the long-term future destiny of humankind and Planet Earth itself, in a context that is potentially galactic in extent and cosmic in scope.

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Notes

1. These sources include, notably, the well-known systems-thinking "iceberg" metaphor, the layering of futures-thinking proposed by Slaughter (2002), the methodology known as *causal layered analysis* developed by Inayatullah (1998a), work on human consciousness (Beck & Cowan 1996; Gardner 1993; Gebser 1985; Graves 1974; Wilber 2000a), and perspectives on social change and macrohistory (Galtung & Inayatullah 1997; Inayatullah 1998b).
2. Note, here the positions of Synchronic and Diachronic are reversed compared to Galtung's usage. The reason is that in the present usage movement "towards the right" is a visual mnemonic for moving from a "static" synchronic view to a "dynamic" diachronic view. This usage is motivated by the common graphical diagrammatic convention in, e.g., the natural sciences, which shows forward movement in time along the horizontal axis towards the right. In addition, movement from the upper row of a level to the lower is a visual mnemonic for moving from idiographic specificity to nomothetic generality. In this way, movements within a level of analysis towards the right and downwards each denote increasing generalisation. These visual menemonics aid in the teaching of this approach, where schematic diagrams can be used to denote the framework as a whole, as well as the different modes of generalisation possible both within and across

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levels of analysis.

3. A review of several approaches considering the future of international relations and global politics may be found in Kaufman (1999).
4. Students in the Strategic Foresight Program at Swinburne University of Technology are introduced to this perspective through an action-learning process (Hayward & Voros 2006) which has since come to be known as "the Sarkar game", and which has been played in a variety of contexts, including internationally, with great success.
5. We have not here touched upon the arena of "world macrohistory", (i.e. level 3, nomothetic-diachronic perspectives), which will be considered in another paper.

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